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SUBJECT: ANBAR TRIBAL POLITICS: LOOKING AHEAD TO THE POST-WAR PERIOD

Classified by PRT Anbar leader James Soriano, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (U) This is a PRT Anbar reporting cable.

¶2. (C) Summary. A struggle for tribal leadership is underway in Anbar Province, as Ali Hatem, a young sheikh of prominent lineage seeks to replace Sheikh Sattar Abu Risha, the tribal leader responsible for evicting Al-Qaeda from Ramadi. Sattar has done much to tip the battlefield in our favor. Al-Qaeda is on the defensive. Public opinion has turned against Hatem and the tribes are mobilized to oppose him. Amid improved security, there is a mood of rising expectations for responsive local government. Those expectations themselves are a sign that public opinion has shifted away from estrangement from Baghdad to getting on with reconstruction. In this context rival tribal factions are jockeying for position in the post-conflict period. The Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP) has questionable clout, but should not be discounted. It is possible that its clerical base can revive its prospects. Sattar holds the IIP in contempt, holding it up as the source of Anbar's woes. He, like many other Anbaris, view the Provincial Council as illegitimate, as it was formed on scant voter turnout in the boycotted 2005 poll. In our view, provincial council elections would not be a threat to Coalition interests. Elections here would more likely consolidate security gains and result in the continuation of pragmatists in public office who would cooperate with us and seek accommodation with Baghdad. End Summary.

#### Tribal Power Challenge

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¶3. (U) A power struggle among influential tribal sheikhs in Anbar Province has spilled onto the world press in recent weeks. The opening salvo was a June 11 story in the &Washington Post,<sup>8</sup> which described fissures inside the Anbar Awakening Council (SAA), the group of anti-insurgent sheikhs based in Ramadi. In that story, SAA founding member Sheikh Ali Hatem Suleiman predicts that the SAA would soon splinter because of membership disaffection with its leader, Sheikh Sattar Abu Risha. The cause of that dissatisfaction, Ali Hatem, did not make clear, apart from charging that Sattar made a fortune as an oil smuggler. Ali Hatem, the 35-year-old scion of the powerful Duleimi tribal confederation, called Sattar a &traitor<sup>8</sup> who &sells his beliefs, his religion, and he people for money.<sup>8</sup> He repeated his accusation of Sattar,s criminal activity in the June 22 &Philadelphia Inquirer.<sup>8</sup>

¶4. (SBU) Ali Hatem,s prediction of the splintering of the SAA apparently came to pass on June 20, when a gathering of SAA sheikhs at Sattar,s compound in Ramadi revoked Ali Hatem,s affiliation with that organization. We spoke with Sattar twice in the aftermath of that event. His comments are interspersed below, but he dismisses Ali Hatem as an erratic young sheikh who seeks to use his family name to

build a popular following. Sattar grinned in recounting Ali Hatem,s charges in the press: it was not disaffected Awakening Council sheikhs who split with Sattar, it was the sheikhs who expelled Ali Hatem.

¶5. (C) Although Sattar moved quickly, Ali Hatem is expected to continue his bid to re-enter post-war Anbar politics. His ad hominem attack is pitched to many Anbaris who have doubts about Sattar. The source of his personal wealth )- the illicit fuel trade -- is widely known. Moreover, Sattar is from the relatively minor Abu Risha tribe, which lives chiefly in the Ramadi area. His many detractors typically describe him as a second-tier sheikh, an upstart, and a sheikh of money and not of social position.

Tribal Awakening

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¶6. (C) Nonetheless, Sattar believes he has won the right to have a voice in Anbar affairs because of his personal bravery and leadership in battling Al-Qaeda. He rose to prominence last September when he formed the SAA, a grassroots reaction to Al-Qaeda,s murder and intimidation campaign. In Sattar,s words, the meaning of the Awakening movement is that &America is not the enemy,<sup>8</sup> a message, he insists, that resonates widely in the Sunni community (see more below). The SAA,s establishment was the turning point in the battle for Anbar province. Sattar supported the Coalition Force,s (CF) police-recruitment drives and quickly got the GOI,s blessing to raise three &emergency response units,<sup>8</sup> (ERUs, and now called PSFs ) Provincial Security Forces) drawn from tribal youth. These auxiliary forces are approved and paid for by the Ministry of Interior.

BAGHDAD 00002229 002 OF 005

¶7. (C) After his success in Ramadi, tribal leaders in other Anbari cities, and even in other provinces, have set up their own ERUs. When we spoke to him in Ramadi on June 25, Sattar claimed that two sheikhs from Salah Ad-Din province were staying at his compound, reportedly seeking his advice on anti-insurgent activities. He claims that other sheikhs from Diyala are also seeking to meet with him.

¶8. (C) Nonetheless, the key point is that Sattar,s ERUs were formed without the provincial government. Last year Sattar did an end-run around provincial officials and appealed directly to the GOI for assistance in setting up the ERUs. The GOI responded favorably and even appointed Sattar as a semi-official provincial security advisor. What followed was a steady decline in violence. According to MNF-West records, Ramadi has recently experienced fewer than 20 security incidents a week, down from the 160-plus incidents weekly last September. Today Ramadi is no longer under insurgent control.

Political Tensions

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¶9. (C) Even as the SAA was succeeding against Al-Qaeda, it took aim at two other targets: Anbar,s Provincial Council and Tariq Al-Hashmi,s Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP). Shortly after its founding, the SAA openly denounced the Provincial Council as illegitimate, absent, and ineffective in the battle against the enemy. There is much truth to these charges. Anbar,s Provincial Council was installed in the January 2005 national election, a poll that widely boycotted by Anbaris, who at time felt estranged from the national political process. Only 3,775 ballots were cast province-wide, in population of 1.2 million residents. The IIP won some 2,700 votes and the right to form the Council. It is on the shaky foundation of this boycotted poll that Anbar,s Provincial Council rests today.

¶10. (SBU) The Provincial Council has been absent from the local scene for much of the past 15 months. It fled to the

relative safety of Baghdad in March 2006 amid continuing insurgent violence. In the following months, it conducted business in Baghdad, but for all practical purposes the provincial government had effectively ceased to function. Only Governor Ma'amoun Sami Rasheed, himself the target of assassination attempts, maintained office hours at the war-damaged Government Center in Ramadi, protected by a company of US Marines. Meanwhile, the SAA charged that the Council abandoned its post, while the tribes stayed to fight the enemy. Privately, IIP figures in the provincial government counter-charged that the SAA's real objective was to take over the Provincial Council.

¶11. (U) Relations between the two sides deteriorated, and in early November PM Maliki appointed Minister of State of Foreign Affairs Dr. Rafe Al-Essawi, a Fallujah native and an IIP member, to mediate. In doing so, the PM bypassed IIP leader and Iraqi Vice President Tariq al-Hashemi, who is widely distrusted by Anbar's tribal leaders. Indeed, several weeks earlier Hashmi had chaired an Anbar reconciliation meeting at Baghdad's Rasheed Hotel, which was snubbed by many Anbari sheikhs. By November 4, Dr. Rafe brokered a compromise in which Provincial Council agreed to expand its membership to create additional seats for SAA representatives, thus giving Sattar at least eight SAA members on the council.

¶12. (U) The developments last fall set a pattern that is still evident today: the reflexive tribal hostility to the IIP; the widely-held perception that the Provincial Council lacks public consent and has an undistinguished record; and the persistent badgering by the Sattar camp to get a bigger voice in provincial affairs, especially on security matters. This spring, Sattar renewed his push for greater representation on the Provincial Council. The IIP, under pressure, opened a dialogue with him, purportedly with a power-sharing agreement as an aim. The talks were inconclusive. No such agreement has been reached, and today relations between the provincial government and the Sattar group are publicly polite, but two sides still harbor suspicions of each other.

¶13. (SBU) Provincial Council Chairman Abdulsalam Abdullah, the senior IIP official in the province and a close associate of Hashemi, repeatedly warns us about Coalition support for Sattar, and also about tribal mobilization more generally. His view is that tribal awakenings diminish the legitimacy of public authority, and that, despite the imperatives of a counter-insurgency strategy, the US should lend its support to local government, as imperfect as it is.

¶14. (SBU) Abdulsalam makes a point on the limited utility of

BAGHDAD 00002229 003 OF 005

tribal engagement, but in a wider sense, his suspicion of tribal influence reflects a deeper social divide. IIP members in Anbar tend to be educated professionals and urban dwellers. Abdulsalam, a physician by training, and Governor Ma'amoun, a civil engineer, are examples. Although such individuals have tribal roots, they are not necessarily tribal, in outlook, and tend to regard tribal authority as feudal relic. The tribes, on the other hand, regard the IIP as alien and disruptive to their traditional way of life. Their unhappy experience with the Ba'ath shapes their views on all parties. &Tribes are easier to control than politicians,8 Sattar half-jokingly told us recently.

The Iraqi Islamic Party

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¶15. (C) Sattar makes little effort to conceal his contempt of the IIP and Sunni fundamentalist groups. In several recent discussions with him, he said that his opposition to the IIP is based on the principle that politics and religion ought not to be mixed, and that any such mixture will refine neither and pollute both. He bluntly describes

cleric-politicians as &frauds.<sup>8</sup> Last November, he traded insults in the Iraqi press with president of the Muslim Scholars Organization Sheikh Harith Al-Dhari after the latter appeared to give support to Al-Qaeda by referring to its actions as &resistance.<sup>8</sup> Sattar is quick to trace the IIP's origins to the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, an association that, in his view, &brought the insurgents into Anbar.<sup>8</sup> Sattar says that he has good relations with individual IIP members, but the party as an organization is a menace to public order.

¶16. (SBU) One point of contention is the use of the term &friendly forces.<sup>8</sup> In press conferences and public statements, Sattar regularly refers to the US Marines and soldiers in Anbar Province as &friendly forces<sup>8</sup> and addresses his written correspondence to them in that fashion.

He dares his detractors to do the same. On two occasions this year, he co-sponsored Ramadi city reconstruction conferences with the MNF-West brigade in Ramadi. At those events, he insisted on displaying the American flag alongside the Iraqi flag. Sattar,s example led to a change of tone by Gov. Ma,amoun. The governor, who has IIP roots but claims to be non-partisan after assuming office in 2005, had long avoided the use of &friendly forces,<sup>8</sup> but has recently used the expression on radio and television. In general, Sattar favors the continuation of US military bases in Anbar for the foreseeable future. He sees the CF as a sword against Al-Qaeda and a shield against Shia overreaching.

"The Honorable Resistance<sup>8</sup>

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¶17. (SBU) Sattar denounces the concept of the &honorable resistance,<sup>8</sup> the moral double-standard that forbids a &resistance group<sup>8</sup> to undertake violence against Iraqi citizens, but countenances attacks against the CF. In Sattar,s words, the honorable resistance is &terrorism with a different face.<sup>8</sup> This position has long put him at odds with the IIP, whose program calls for the &liberation<sup>8</sup> of Iraq from &occupation forces,<sup>8</sup> and which seeks also a &fair and objective<sup>8</sup> view of the Iraq insurgency, an ambiguous loophole that holds open the moral acceptability of the &honorable resistance.<sup>8</sup> Sattar puts much of the blame for the insurgency on Sunni clerics who accommodated radical calls to arms.

¶18. (SBU) By contrast, Ali Hatem finds the &honorable resistance<sup>8</sup> to be a valid moral distinction. On June 13, he chaired a meeting of several dozen Anbari sheikhs in the Euphrates River town of Hit. That meeting produced a set of resolutions, among which was a distinction between &terrorists,<sup>8</sup> who ought to be fought, and the &honorable Iraqi resistance,<sup>8</sup> which ought to be supported. What was not clear, however, was whether the attendees at that conference, several of whom reportedly were Sattar supporters, approved that language or whether the document was drafted chiefly by Ali Hatem without their explicit concurrence.

¶19. (SBU) Two days later, Ali Hatem got into hot water on &Al-Arabiyah<sup>8</sup> when he expanded his attack on Sattar to include the Coalition. &I am against the Americans,<sup>8</sup> he said, adding later &as far as we are concerned, we are not agents and have nothing to do with the Americans. Our war will continue against AQI, the militias, and the American Forces until the last man.<sup>8</sup> Such inflammatory words were apparently too much for Ali Hatem,s own people in Ramadi. His uncle, Sheikh Amer, the titular head of the Dulaimi federation, reined him in. Ali Hatem recanted in an undated weekly Anbar newspaper, &The Voice of Anbar,<sup>8</sup> which appears

BAGHDAD 00002229 004 OF 005

to have been issued after the &al-Arabiyah<sup>8</sup> interview. &Our principle enemy is Al-Qaeda and not the Americans,<sup>8</sup> he said. But the damage was done. Ali Hatem delivered his message on a widely viewed TV broadcast and later modified

his views in an obscure local publication. Sattar points to the flip-flop as evidence of Ali Hatem's untrustworthiness.

The &Iraq Awakening Movement8

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¶20. (SBU) In April, Sattar sought to transform the SAA into a political party, the &Iraq Awakening Movement8 (SAI). The move was widely seen as a bid to compete with the IIP in future Provincial Council elections. Sattar maintains that the SAI secular and seeks to advance national unity and reconciliation. He disavows any political ambitions for himself, but sees the party as the home for Sunni aspirations. However, two months after the party's founding it does not seem to have gotten much traction. Sattar told us in late June that the party's current work is a continual round of meetings with Anbari sheikhs, to explain to them the need for a party. Apart from its base in Ramadi, the SAI has reportedly sought to open offices in at least two other cities. Sattar alleges the premises have been vandalized by his opponents.

¶21. (C) On 22 May, in a move to break onto the national political scene, senior SAI representatives met with three Shia national parliamentarians associated with Muqtada al-Sadr in Sadr City. It was the first public contact between the two seemingly disparate groups. Sattar says that the meeting was arranged because Iraq's Shia and Sunni communities face a common enemy in Al-Qaeda. The two sides issued a joint statement calling for fighting terrorism, reconciliation, and an early date for provincial council elections. The SAI's Shia interlocutors wanted to include a timetable for the Coalition's withdrawal, but the Sattarists declined.

¶22. (C) Sattar is open to the idea of a meeting between himself and Muqtada, but maintains the timing is not right. He believes that such an encounter would attract lightning from both the GOI and the camp of Shia political leader Abdul Aziz Al-Hakim, who might regard a Sattar-Muqtada combination as a threat. Though he harbors predictable Sunni suspicions about Shia intentions ) both Sattar and Gov. Ma'amoun regularly warn us frequently about encroachments onto Anbar's jurisdiction by Karbali and Najafi police ) he and his aides insist that the SAI is not a sectarian movement. Indeed, Sattar says that the SAI delegation was enthusiastically greeted on Sadr City streets.

Elections

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¶23. (SBU) Sattar maintains the IIP has little public support in Anbar and would not fare well at the polls. This view is commonly held among many of our contacts, and even some IIP members privately acknowledge that their party has dim prospects in Anbar. One sheikh, who is no Sattar admirer, maintains that the IIP is strong only in Fallujah, which is close to Baghdad and less tribal than other parts of Anbar. However, when uttered by tribal leaders such views may be self-serving. Until there is a free election, most statements about the relative strength of the IIP and rival movements tend to be speculative.

¶24. (SBU) Still, it would be wrong to sell the IIP short. There are already indications that the party is ready to breathe new life into its presence in Anbar. The ulema is a key. Their inclinations bear watching. In recent Anbar history, the ulema have shaped and reflected public sentiment. Mosque preachers here did much to foment the insurgency in 2003-04. They have done much recently to calm the situation. They could do much to aid the IIP in the future. Even though the AIM engages clerics, Sattar is wary of them. In his view, Iraqi society is most easily penetrated through the ulema.

Comment: The Post-War Period

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¶25. (C) Anbar Province is emerging from the battle against the insurgency into the post-war period. Western Iraq is in a messy and still-dangerous transition, but the key political actors are jockeying for position. Al-Qaeda is on the defensive. Public opinion has turned against al-Qaeda, and the tribes are mobilized against it. To be sure, the public wants the CF out of its cities, but virtually all our contacts recognize that the province is not yet ready to provide for security without CF help. Still there is a mood of rising expectations for accountable and responsive local

BAGHDAD 00002229 005 OF 005

government. Those expectations themselves are evidence that public opinion has shifted from estrangement from the national political scene to getting on with the business of reconstruction.

¶26. (C) Today the political landscape in Anbar has the following features: The Provincial Council is widely seen as illegitimate. An uneasy truce exists between the IIP and the Sattar's SAI over the control of provincial government. Municipal councils are self-selected and self-perpetuating. Tribal factions are squabbling over leadership. The IIP is down but not out. The SAI has long agitated for an early provincial ballot, while the IIP has not yet revealed its hand.

¶27. (C) In our view, provincial council elections would further Coalition war aims. An election would help consolidate the security gains that have been made in the past nine months and would not be destabilizing. Indeed, a provincial election would likely result in the continuation of pragmatists in public office, personalities much in the mold of the current provincial leadership, who would cooperate with the Coalition while groping for an accommodation with Baghdad. In some respects, Anbar Province, a contested battleground last fall, is today perhaps a step or two ahead of other parts of Iraq.

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